

[21 : 45] The words of the wise, heard, and quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour. A wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.

Even when the fool walks in the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he is a fool. If the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great defences to rest.

There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were, an error proceeding from the ruler. Folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place. I have seen slaves and horses and princes walking on the ground like slaves.

He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

[22 : 51] If the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. If the serpent bites before it is charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer.

The words of a wise man's mouth win him favour, but the lips of a fool consume him. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.

A fool multiplies words, though no man knows what it is to be, and who can tell him what will be after him? The toil of a fool wearies him, but he does not know the way to the city.

Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning. Happy are you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength and not for drunkenness.

Through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks. Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

[23 : 55] Even in your thoughts do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some wind creature tell the matter.

Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. We'll sing again now to God's praise. We'll sing from Sing Psalms number 14. Sing Psalms 14, and we'll sing the whole of this psalm you'll find on the screen.

The fool speaks in his heart, there is no God, he says. They are corrupt, their deeds are vile, none walk in godly ways. The Lord looks down from heaven, upon the human race, to see if any understand, if any see God's face.

And so on. We'll sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise. We'll stand to sing. The fool speaks in his heart, there is no God, he says.

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile, none walk in godly ways.

[25 : 15] The Lord looks down from heaven, upon the human race, to see if any understand, if any see God's face.

They all have turned aside, for up they have become.

Not one of them does any good, nor not a single one.

Well, sinners never learn, my people live deeper, as if they were consuming bread, they never seek the Lord.

Stuck down they are with debt, for God is with the just.

[26 : 50] You leave the poor, shape the poor, but in the Lord they trust.

May have from Zion come, the Lord his countess great, and let the table's stripes rejoice, let Israel gladly sing.

Amen. Let's pray as we come back to God's word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that you are our God, we thank you that you are the source of all wisdom, and we pray that you would open our ears, that you would illuminate our minds, that you would help us to focus our eyes on your word, that the fool in his heart says that there is no God.

We pray that you would give us wisdom, Lord, and that we would know you, that we would, as we sang, be near to you, that we would live near to you, and that day by day we would seek the wisdom that comes from heaven.

[28 : 25] And Lord, above all, we pray that we would be seeking, that we would be trusting in the Lord Jesus, the one who is life, the one who is wisdom, the one who saves.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. In our lives, we are always making decisions, decisions, and considering one thing in relation to another.

We are always thinking about, what is the best choice? What is better than something else? So, quite a few young ones here tonight, I will maybe ask you a question or two.

What is better? Crisps or chocolate? It's a hard choice, that one, isn't it? What's better? School or holidays?

It's a no-brainer, is it? What's better? Roast beef or salad? Salad? That's a surprise one there.

[29 : 32] Some are shaking their heads in disbelief. What's better? Celtic or Rangers? No, don't answer that question. In life, we're always making judgments.

We're always thinking about, what's better? What's better? What's the best thing that we can do? What's the best thing that we can give our time to? Even in terms of politics, it's in the news all this week.

And the way that politics work, often is that, you have different parties, they have their manifestos, they print them, they canvass, they lobby, and each party is arguing against the other one that they could manage the country, they could govern the country better than their competitors.

Business is the same. You have that kind of pressure. Different companies, they produce products, and they try to persuade the consumer that their product, their brand is better than anything else that's on the market.

And in sport, it's an obvious thing as well. We see teams, whether it's on the park down the road, or whether it's in Hamden Stadium or Wembley, we have teams who are battling it out.

[30 : 53] They enter leagues, they enter cups, they're trying to be better than their competition.

Now, the section that we read this evening in Ecclesiastes, from verse 11 of chapter 9 through to the end of chapter 10, It's quite a hard passage to find a neat structure for.

There's lots of seemingly random sayings, lots of kind of soundbites that are all kind of brought together.

But the main message, which if you've got an ESV, it's in the heading, the main message that runs through the whole section is that wisdom is better than folly.

To live wisely is better than to live foolishly. Three points in the time that we have. The first point is the confusing world.

We're living in a confusing world. And the second point, just to give you the structure, is the continual choice. In this confusing world, we are continually having to make choices.

[32 : 08] And we may choose to be wise and go the wise way. We may choose sometimes to be foolish and go our own way. And the last thing that we see in this section is the Christian hope.

The Christian's hope. So these are the three points. And we're just going to step through the verses that are before us. So you've got your Bible open. I'm going to be sticking closely closely to the text tonight.

And we'll just read through it together. So first of all, the confusing world. Verse 11. Again I saw, says Solomon, that under the sun, which is another way of saying in this world, the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge.

So Solomon, he's about to argue in this section that it's better to choose wisdom than it is to choose foolishness.

It's better to do the right thing than it is to do the wrong thing. It's better to go God's way than to go the way of this world. But he's prefacing this with a realistic warning that just because we choose wisdom, just because we choose to live a righteous life with God's help, just because we choose to live in a way that's godly, that doesn't guarantee us a life under the sun, a life in this world that will go well.

[33 : 45] Sometimes we hear people preaching what used to be called the prosperity gospel. It's just lies. And the message was, follow God, trust in Jesus, your life will be happy and healthy and everything will go well.

And Solomon is right at the beginning of this section saying it's better to choose wisdom than foolishness, but don't expect that just because you do that, everything will be smooth and everything will go well.

because this is a confusing, unpredictable, topsy-turvy world that we live in. There are some people here who are math students and the world of maths, which is alien to me, I'm struggling with Lois'

homework in first year, I'm afraid.

The world of maths is predictable. So there are sums and there are answers. And there are right answers that are wrong answers. So the sum of 2 plus 2, any of the young ones awake? 2 plus 2? Not 22, Michael. Say it with a cheeky smile. 2 plus 2 is 4. And it's always 4.

[35 : 01] It's always going to be 4. It's predictable. It's a constant thing. There are formulas which have been worked out that are predictable. They don't change. E equals MC squared, which is the most famous formula for the theory of relativity.

I don't understand anything about it, but I know it doesn't change. It's a predictable, it's a constant thing. And Solomon in verses 11 and 12 is telling us that what happens in this world, what happens under the sun, is not that predictable.

And he uses all these pictures. And he says, if we paraphrase his words here, he says, it's not always the fastest person or the fittest person who wins the race.

All things, all kinds of things can happen in a race. Races can be interfered with. And it's not always the strongest person who wins the battle. Fights can be dirty.

They can go funny ways. And sometimes the wisest people, the most gifted people, go hungry. Because in this world, in their lifetime, their gift is not recognized.

[36 : 21] Vincent van Gogh is one of the most famous artists of all time. And yet, I understand that during van Gogh's lifetime, he was pretty much unknown.

And he was considered to be a failure. His art was not appreciated. And Solomon goes on to say things like, well, you know, it's not always the most intelligent people who get rich.

And we see that, don't we? Who are the richest people in our day? Generally, celebrities. What do they do? Who knows what they do? Or football players.

They're the mega rich people in our country at this time. And the most knowledgeable people, Solomon highlights, they often fall out of favor.

And more ignorant people take control in countries. Think about Russia than Putin. There are people who know more, who are more gifted, who are better qualified to lead than Putin.

[37 : 35] But they know things and when they're identified as being people who know and have skills, they disappear. They're wiped out to ensure that more ignorant dictators maintain control.

And that's the way of things. Under the sun. Sometimes things under the sun are confusing and seem very wrong.

Time and chance happen to them all. Verse 11. For man does not know his time, like fish that are taken in an evil net and like birds that are caught in a snare. So the children of man are snared at an evil time when it suddenly falls upon them.

And we get a sense in that. That Solomon knew and we know too that we live in a confusing world. Second point is the continual choice.

we're in exam season just now and the school pupils and university and college students are doing their assessments.

[38 : 50] Some of these exams are big wide open questions, you have to write essays. Some of the exams like maths and science, you're given a multiple choice format. You're asked a question and you have to make a choice and it's either A or it's B.

And that's almost the format that we see in the long section that goes from verse 17 of chapter 9 through to the end of chapter 10.

We see two ways. There's option A which is the way of wisdom and there's option B which is the way of folly and Solomon is teaching us, he's persuading us that wisdom is better than folly.

So let's just step through the verses and follow the logic and the pictures that he paints. Verse 17, we keep hearing this phrase, better than, better than, better than.

The words of the wise, heard and quiet, are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

[39 : 55] Now Solomon, remember who he is, he's the king, he's a ruler and Solomon can shout and no one can tell him to be quiet because he's in that position of supreme authority.

Solomon has access to all the weapons of war in that place at that time and yet Solomon, he recognises that great shouting and great displays of power, although he can do both, are often more destructive than they are good.

Great shouting, great displays of power in the hands of a sinner are destructive and not good.

Solomon's observation is that quiet, wise words are far more effective than furious shouting and the

flexing of muscles.

Moving into chapter 10, we see wisdom and foolishness in all kinds of places and situations in life and like I said, I'd love to be able to split it into neat subsections but I just can't see any structure that allows me to do that.

When I was going through this and thinking, is there an order here, are there sections that we can split this into, I was at a bit of a loss and my mind went to children's birthday parties.

[41 : 31] You know when the children go to a birthday party for a four or a five year old and the buffet is there on the table and there's cake and there's crisps and there's sweets and there's jelly and there's fruit and there's ham sandwiches and you watch the children at the birthday party.

And there's a bouncy castle or whatever, they're bouncing all over the place, they're playing and then they realise they're hungry and so they head for the buffet, they start with the cake, handful of cake and then they move from the cake to the sausage rolls and there's a handful of jelly babies, maybe a ham sandwich, a bit of a banana, some crisps, some chocolate and they're back to the sausage rolls and so it goes on.

Just handfuls of this, handfuls of that, that there's no real order, they're just taking a bit of everything. And that seems to be a bit like this chapter, there's lots of wisdom and it's all mashed up together in the experience of life.

So verse one, dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench, so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honour.

back in the day that Solomon is writing, perfume wasn't sold in bottles with a spray top, it was ointment in a bowl and the scent was amazing in these ointments with the mix of spices and everything that was used, it was an amazing scent because of how it was blended but one rogue fly into that ointment and the scent turns into a stink.

[43 : 17] And the illustration that Solomon uses is a powerful one. He thinks about the person who seeks to live fairly well.

He's thinking about the person who lives a largely wise good life. We can just picture this person, they have a steady-ish life, they have a pretty good reputation and it may be built up over many years but just a little foolishness, just one bad decision, just one harsh word in the wrong place at the worst time, just one unwise social media post, one unfaithful encounter can outweigh all these years of wisdom and just bring such ruin, one rogue fly.

And it's a picture that's powerful that Solomon puts to us, it's better to go the wise way than to go the way of the fool. Year after year, day after day, decision after decision.

just a little foolishness can just cause such havoc. Verse 2, a wise man's heart inclines him to the right, but a fool's heart to the left.

And this isn't to do with direction, it's not to do with being left-handed or right-handed, it's just to do with choosing either the right way or the wrong way. There's a right way, there's a wrong way.

[45 : 00] This is about moral, it's about moral choices, not directional choices. I often think about a football coach that we had in primary school and he was always lambasting us, we were a terrible football team, and he used to say over and over again, there's a right way to do this and there's a wrong way to do this and you guys are playing the wrong way.

And we are given a choice day by day, we can go to the right or we can go to the left, we can go to the wrong. The wise heart pursues righteousness, the fool's heart goes his own way.

Verse 3, even when the fool walks on the road, he lacks sense, and he says to everyone that he's a fool. Now we don't see so much of this here, but walk down the street in any city on a Friday or a Saturday night, and we can see people staggering along the street, falling off the payments, straying in the middle of the road.

They're taking their lives in their hands at the end of a raucous night, and they say it's fun, it's a great night out. And Solomon says it's foolishness.

Everyone can see, even from the way you walk, that you're being foolish. verse 4, verse 4, if the anger of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your place, for calmness will lay great offenses to rest.

[46 : 42] We've all been in this kind of a situation where the ruler, the boss at work, is giving us a hard time.

And maybe you're there in the classroom, you feel that the teacher has just been unjust, or the boss in the office, or the fish farm is giving you a hard time, he's got it against you.

Every time you step out of line, you're getting it, anybody else can see anything, and they just go unnoticed. And it's always you, the temptation in these situations, when you feel the ruler is rising against you, it's just to lose the rag, and stand up, and walk out, and tell them you can find someone else to do your stupid job.

But what's the wise thing to do? Well, Solomon says the wise thing is to remain calm. Don't add more offense to the situation.

Let your calm response bring rest. And that applies in all areas of life, from the classroom, to the office, to the workplace, to all kinds of meetings that we can find ourselves in.

[48 : 05] Verse five, there is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as it were an error proceeding from the ruler. Folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place.

I have seen slaves and horses, and princes walking on the ground like slaves. And these verses, verse five there to seven, Solomon, he speaks about foolishness in high places, and Solomon is in the highest place.

He has all these civil servants around him, he has all these VIPs, up close and personal, he can see them. And so he's able to speak about foolishness in high places.

And whether it's back then, or whether it's still today, when kings and queens and presidents and politicians are foolish in the way that they govern, in the way that they behave, everyone suffers. That's the observation that Solomon is making. There's a reason we're told in the book of Timothy to pray for those that the Lord has put in authority over us.

[49 : 23] They need wisdom. And we need to pray that they will be those who will seek wisdom and be humble enough to receive wisdom from God.

Verses eight, now down to eleven. He who digs a pit will fall into it, and a serpent will bite him who breaks through a wall. He who quarries stones is hurt by them, and he who splits logs is endangered by them.

If the iron is blunt and one does not sharpen the edge, he must use more strength, but wisdom helps one to succeed. If the serpent bites before it's charmed, there is no advantage to the charmer. Now, think in these verses, what Solomon is doing is he's picking out various tasks. He's thinking about the working world, and there's various tasks that were part of just life and work in Old Testament times, and so there were those who were employed digging a pit, and there were some who were employed to break down a wall, and there were some who were gifted and trained in the trade of quarrying stones, and there were those who were splitting logs, snake charms. Not something we have here, but that was part of life back then as well. So there's an eclectic mix of jobs there, and Solomon is making the observation that in each job, in each task, wisdom is required.

[50 : 59] And in each task, if there is foolishness, there will be harm, and energy expended, which was unnecessary. The picture of the axe is probably the one that's closest to us in terms of understanding.

I've got these logs out the back of the house, and some days I go at them, battering them with an axe, and I'm sweating and expending energy, and it's bouncing off the logs, and I'm getting more frustrated.

My time would be far better spent the first 15 minutes sharpening the axe, rather than just heading to the wood pile and starting to batter away. Wisdom is required, and we should pray.

Very practical point, very sensible thing, to pray at the beginning of each working day. Now, whatever it is we're doing, whatever it is we're employed, whatever task we're engaged in, whether we're sitting a maths test in a classroom, whether we're heading into a hospital ward, whether we're going out with a nurse's bag around to different houses in the community, whether we've just retired like Farrakha, if you wondered what the big blast on the horn of the ferry last night, that was Farrakha retiring, a big thank you blast.

Whatever we're doing in our retirement, in our working life, in our classroom, whatever, let's be sure that at the beginning of each working day, we pray for wisdom, that we ask God to help us.

[52 : 44] Verse 12, we're getting there. The words of a wise man's mouth win him favour, but the lips of a fool consume him. The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness, and the end of his talk is evil madness.

A fool multiplies his words, though no man knows what is to be, and who can tell him what will be after. This section just focuses on the words that we use.

It's a recurring theme in this book. It's a theme that James picks up in his little letter. The tongue is a very small thing, but it can do great harm, and it can do great good.

So, even as we heard this morning in the Sermon on the Mount, we need wisdom when it comes to our words, when it comes to how we use our tongues. A lack of wisdom in the things that we say brings no end of trouble.

Verse 15, the toil of a fool wearies him, for he does not know the way to the city. The picture there is the picture of someone who sort of careers off at high speed to the city, but doesn't actually check where he's going before he goes there, which is a lot like every holiday that we ever go on.

[54 : 11] How many of us men need to see this? How often have we headed off into Glasgow saying, I know fine where I'm going, and actually we don't.

And there's a big domestic happening in the car ten minutes later. That could have been avoided if we'd just taken two minutes to figure out the way to the city before we got into the car.

It's wisdom. Verse 16, Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, your princess feasts in the morning.

Happier you, O land, when your king is the son of the nobility, and your princess feasts at the proper time for strength, and not for drunkenness. And this is another recurring theme, it's a wee bit more of what we've had already.

Wisdom is needed for those in high places. And that's a word for us, if ever there was a word. As we see the instability of our country, as we see the unpredictability of those who are so often in positions of power, we need wisdom.

[55 : 22] They need wisdom. God will give wisdom liberally to those who ask. Verse 18, through sloth the roof sinks in, and through indolence the house leaks.

More wisdom for working lives. Verse 19, bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything.

this is a kind of slightly confusing verse. The best I can do with that, I think, is to tie it up with what's gone before. One of the recurring lessons in the book of Ecclesiastes is that we are to be thankful for the good gifts that God gives us.

If we have something to eat, we should be thankful. if we have something to drink, we should be thankful for it. If we have money to buy what we need, we should be thankful. It's wise to be thankful for every good gift that comes from heaven.

It's unwise to love these gifts, to love these gifts too much, and to lose sight of the one who gives them to us. Verse 20, even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom, curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some wind creature tell the matter.

[56 : 47] This is another watch what you say proverb. We've all been told in the past, haven't we? You know, sometimes you have somebody who will come up to us and they want to speak to us about something.

They've got a question to ask. They've heard something. And they'll say, you know, I've heard something, you know, I've heard something about what happened last week, or something that happened in the office, or something that happened in a meeting.

And you say, well, how did you hear about that? And what do they say in response? They say, a little bird told me. A little bird told me. And that's the picture that Solomon is using here.

He says, watch what you say. Watch even what you think, because a little bird can take what you say, and what you think is a secret, private place, and carry it off.

And then you're having an awkward conversation. You're trying to select reverse gear. You're trying to explain why you said what you shouldn't have said. I was thinking about Twitter.

[57 : 57] I'm not on Twitter, but lots of people are. I think it's called X nowadays, but it used to be called Twitter. Twitter. And what was the symbol for Twitter? If I'm right, I think it was a little bird.

And that little bird, called Twitter, can carry you a few words around the world in seconds. And there are so many stories of people who have lost everything and have broken relationships because of a few unwise characters that were carried off by the little bird to places they never expected them to go.

Today, so much of what we say online gets carried so far, so quickly, and once it's out, it can never be taken back. It's like the tube of toothpaste.

You know, you squeeze the toothpaste out, there's a blob of it. Try putting it back in. It's impossible. And Solomon is repeatedly saying to us, what's your words?

What's your words? Be wise, says Solomon. It's a continual choice. In work, in conversation, in every part of life, we are given continual choices.

[59 : 20] We can go to the left or the right. We can go the way of wisdom, or we can go our own foolish path. So Solomon is saying, make the wise choice.

Wisdom is better than folly. And it was a lesson for back then, and it's a timeless lesson. It's for us now to be wise.

It's far better. It's eternally better than to be a fool. So who is the fool? the fool? Well, the psalmist answered that question for us in Psalm 14.

The fool says in his heart, there is no God. It's just life under the sun. The fool, in his thinking, leaves God out.

The fool trusts in his own understanding and doesn't acknowledge God. So who is the wise person? Well, the wise person is the one who looks to God, who trusts in God, and who asks for the wisdom that God is so willing to give to those who will come seeking it.

[60 : 38] So is that the end? Sorry, boys and girls, but not quite yet. We've got just two more minutes.

The last point, as we rewind back to chapter 9, verses 13 to 16, is the Christian hope. See, the most important thing for us to take away from this message tonight is not simply that we get wisdom from God.

It's important that we come each day and that we seek wisdom from God. That's important, but the most important thing is that we get to know in a saving way the God who is wisdom.

And this takes us to the Christian hope. And there's a wee section here which I think is a parable, that Solomon brings to us in verse 13 to 16 of chapter 9.

He says, I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with a few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building a great siege works against it.

[61 : 58] But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. yet no one remembered that poor man. But I say that wisdom is better than might, though this poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.

good. I want to just ask the question as we finish. Who do we see here? Solomon is telling us a story about a wise man who appeared poor in the eyes of the world.

Who's he thinking of? I don't know who he's thinking of, and neither do you. but I think in this parable we can see Jesus.

Three thousand years later, we can see Jesus because he came from heaven into the little city of this world.

And this world was under attack. The devil was besieging it. and the few men of this world were no match for Satan.

[63 : 20] So how could this city be delivered? Well, in God's amazing salvation plan, it was through his son.

And as the world looked at God the son, what they saw was a poor, wise man. Isaiah tells us that there was nothing outwardly attractive and striking about Jesus.

He was despised. He was rejected. And yet he was wisdom. He was wisdom itself.

And the sad thing is that most people closed their ears to him. Most would not accept the wisdom of Christ. Most would not accept the wisdom of the cross.

But without that wisdom, there is no salvation. There's no hope. So where is our hope tonight?

[64 : 28] where is the Christian hope? The Christian hope is found in Jesus. Christian hope is not dependent on us making continual wise choices.

Because I don't do it and neither do you. Christian hope is found in the one who is wisdom. the one who lived the perfect wise godly life for us.

He lived for us. He died for us. He rose for us. And the God man, he will save us.

He will give us eternal hope. if we trust in Him. Let's sing to finish. In Christ alone, our hope is found. Amen. Amen.

[66 : 34] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.